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**Remarks As Prepared for Delivery at a
Naturalization Ceremony for 50 Citizenship Candidates**

Washington, D.C.

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Thank you, Alejandro, for your introduction, and for allowing me to be here with you today.

Attorney General Eric Holder was unable to attend today's ceremony because he is attending a funeral, and he sends his sincere regrets. I am honored to represent him here today, and to bear witness this remarkable occasion.

Any time I have the opportunity to be with new Americans, I am reminded of my parents. They both came to this country seeking refuge from a repressive regime in the Dominican Republic.

My mother arrived in the '30s when her father was appointed Ambassador to the U.S. After my grandfather spoke out against the dictator following the brutal massacre of thousands of Haitians, he was declared "persona non grata."

My father fled the same brutal regime later, and showed his gratitude for the refuge he found here by serving with distinction as a physician in the United States Army. His service to the country led to a lifelong medical career dedicated to serving veterans. My parents settled in Buffalo, New York, and raised me and my four siblings to have great respect for this nation, and a great responsibility to it. Both of my parents naturalized when they became eligible. My uncles served in the armed forces and naturalized under an expedited program for service members.

My family, like so many before them, and like all of you, sought the great privileges and responsibilities that come with American citizenship.

For the entirety of our nation's history, immigrants have come here seeking prosperity, opportunity, liberty and equality. Despite often heated battles over immigration policy, we are a nation of immigrants; our diversity has always been our greatest strength. The vast majority of Americans have a story, somewhere in their rich history, of immigration to America. Some of those stories are painful and remind us of a dark time in our history. Others are stories of hope

for a brighter future. But the stories are what bind us to each other, for all of our differences, the stories are what make us one.

You are about to become our newest citizens. Hailing from 24 different countries, each of you represents a different culture, a different language, a different way of dress. But you will each now be American.

Now, this doesn't mean that you give up what sets you apart. Our differences are what make our nation's diversity so valuable, as we learn from each other, bringing the best of each culture together to make one unique, American culture.

And this is what makes this country so special. Because what makes you an American isn't the color of your skin, or the religion you practice, or the food you eat, or the language you speak.

Rather, what makes you an American is that you uphold the principles of equality, freedom and democracy. These are the foundations of our country. They are written into our founding documents, and they are what have long called to people from all over the world, drawing them to our borders and our shores.

The late Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis said "the only title in our democracy superior to that of President is the title of citizen."

Indeed, the power of an American citizen is great. But with that power comes great responsibility.

As you take your oath today, you will be taking on much more than a new passport and the requirement to serve jury duty. It is not just a privilege, but a grave responsibility to be an American citizen, and to make your voice heard.

Your participation in our democracy is essential to making it work. The right to participate actively in our democracy is one for which men and women have fought, and even given their lives. We owe it to them, as well as to ourselves and to our children, to stay actively engaged, and to vote.

Congratulations on becoming our nation's newest citizens. I hope you will use your new status to become active participants in your communities, and to help make our country even better for the next generation.

Thank you.